

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

FIT TO FIGHT: ADMIN OR ETHOS?
EMBEDDING FITNESS IN AIR FORCE CULTURE

by

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Biography

Lieutenant Colonel Ronald J. Dougherty graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Tampa in 1988 and earned a regular commission as a Distinguished Graduate of AFROTC, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida. He entered active duty in March 1989 as a personnel officer, serving in the 7th Mission Support Squadron, Carswell Air Force Base, Fort Worth, Texas, then in the 51st Mission Support Squadron, Osan Air Base, Korea.

In June 1994, Colonel Dougherty was assigned to the Headquarters Air Intelligence Agency, Kelly Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas, followed by the 470th Air Base Squadron, Geilenkirchen NATO Air Base, Germany, in June 1997, and the 1st Mission Support Squadron, Langley Air Force Base, Hampton, Virginia, in June 2000. He graduated from the Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama, in June 2003.

Following school, Colonel Dougherty commanded the 6th Mission Support Squadron, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida, then moved across base in July 2005 for joint duty at the Headquarters United States Special Operations Command. He left in July 2008 for a year-long in-resident study at the Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama.

Colonel Dougherty is a 1995 Squadron Officer School and 2003 Air Command and Staff College Distinguished Graduate. He earned a Master of Arts degree from Our Lady of the Lake University, San Antonio, Texas, in 1997, and deployed in support of Operations JOINT FORGE, Sarajevo, Bosnia, and IRAQI FREEDOM, Baghdad, Iraq. His decorations include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal with two oak leaf clusters, the Meritorious Service Medal with three oak leaf clusters, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, the Air Force Commendation Medal with oak leaf cluster, and the Air Force Achievement Medal with two oak leaf clusters.

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Preface

I am not a fitness fanatic, but I do believe in wellness. My interest in running in particular began 28 years ago when my mom joined a running club. She ran for fun at first then competed in a 5K race in 1981. Later that year, at the age of 45, she ran a marathon. I ran that first 5K with her but did so with no training. Though I finished the race, it was not a good experience, and I did not run again until entering college in 1984. AFROTC conducted fitness tests each semester, requiring cadets to complete, among other events, a timed 1.5-mile run. I knew then that running would have to become a part of my life if I was to make the Air Force a career.

Through the years, I exercised primarily to maintain standards. Real passion for wellness did not stir until January 2007. While following doctor's orders, I suffered a potentially devastating toxic reaction to medicine prescribed for slightly elevated cholesterol levels. In hindsight, we should have explored changes in diet and exercise before opting for pills. The mistake nearly cost my kidneys, but it turned out good for me in the end. Resolving to take full responsibility for my own wellness, I have since lost 18 pounds and have run two marathons.

I applaud Gen John Jumper's effort to embed fitness in the culture of the Air Force. He was clearly on to something. But, you need little more than visual evidence to conclude we have not yet achieved his vision. Nevertheless, the goal is worthy of continued pursuit. I want to thank Maj Gen Dave Scott for always doing "what leaders do"; my faculty advisor, Col Dutch Holland, for his time and attention; my classmate, Col (sel) Glen Downing, for helping me lock down the "admin or ethos" notion; and, of course, my parents and son, Justice, for their love and support.

Abstract

Physical fitness is absolutely essential for effective military service. Recognizing that since the Air Force's inception its fitness efforts have failed to produce a fit force, then-chief of staff Gen John P. Jumper became the catalyst for change. In a series of "Chief's Sight Pictures" in 2003, he unveiled "Fit to Fight," a new program intended to embed fitness in the culture of the service. "The amount of energy we devote to our fitness programs is not consistent with the growing demands of our warrior culture. It's time to change that," the general declared. It was indeed time, and five years into the new program, it is time to ask what, if anything, has changed.

This research study attempts to answer the question, is the Air Force "Fit to Fight" Fitness Program admin or ethos? In other words, has it succeeded in creating a fitness culture? The author begins by exploring fitness in the Air Force today to establish a baseline for discussion. Then, after describing salient features of renowned social psychologist Edgar H. Schein's Organizational Culture and Leadership model, he uses the Schein model as a conceptual framework to analyze the extent to which fitness has been embedded in the service's culture.

The paper concludes with recommendations to facilitate the cultural change with respect to fitness the Air Force desires. Suggestions include modifying major elements of the fitness program and improving its accountability and support. The paper also explains how leaders can effect change using Schein's primary cultural embedding mechanisms. Fitness is a vital part of military duty. It needs to become part of a warrior ethos rather than be treated as just another administrative requirement. As such, this topic should be of interest to all Airmen.

Chapter 1

Introduction

I want to make very clear that my focus is not on passing a fitness test once a year. More important, we are changing the culture of the Air Force. This is about our preparedness to deploy and fight. It's about warriors. It is about instilling an expectation that makes fitness a daily standard – an essential part of your service.

—Gen John P. Jumper, 17 October 2003

Laughingstock. Merriam-Webster defines the term as “an object of ridicule.”¹ Over the years, many non-Air Force servicemembers have used the term to disparage Air Force fitness programs. Sadly, few Airmen have balked at the insults. Commenting on the current fitness program’s predecessor, cycle ergometry, Maj Benjamin Smart found consensus among 50 of his peers at the Air Command and Staff College. Though fewer than half of those interviewed said they exercised regularly, all had passed the “bike” test, and not one “had any respect” for it.² The program preceding the bike involved a 1.5-mile timed run, but attitudes toward it were similarly negative. One captain called the standards “a joke,” describing how “guys would run a little bit, smoke a cigarette and then run a little bit more” and still pass the test.³

Hyperbole aside, the criticisms seem warranted. The obesity rate among Airmen today is more than double what it was in 1995.⁴ The 2008 data show that 12.2 percent of Airmen, or roughly 40,000 servicemembers, are in serious need of a diet. An additional 44.4 percent of the force are overweight. These numbers combine to reveal a startling picture--more than 56 percent of Airmen are considered “fat” by service standards as the following chart depicts:

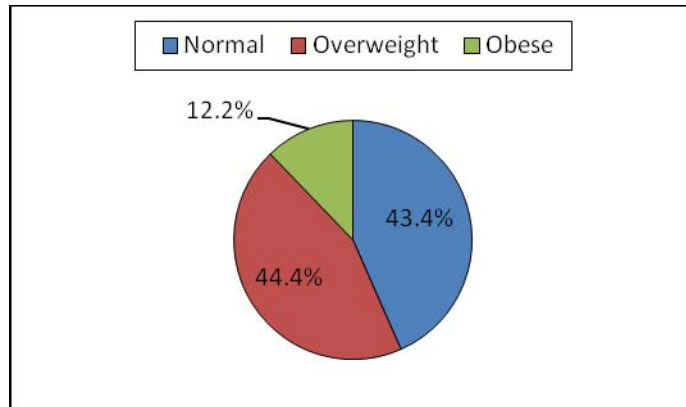


Figure 1. 2008 Air Force Obesity Rate

Yet, this figure belies the reported 99 percent Air Force fitness test pass rate.⁵

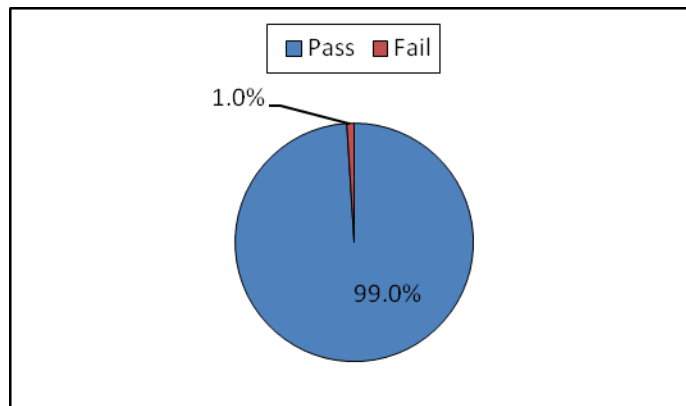


Figure 2. 2008 Air Force Fitness Assessment Pass Rate

Five years earlier, as if sensing what the future held, then-chief of staff of the US Air Force, Gen John P. Jumper, promised servicemembers a new fitness program “that gets back to the basics of running, sit-ups, and pushups.”⁶ What distinguished this initiative from all previous efforts was its emphasis on changing the culture of the service to produce a “Fit to Fight” force.

Fit to Fight

Beginning in July 2003, General Jumper authored a series of five “Chief’s Sight Pictures” entitled “Fit to Fight.” In his first article, he praised the Air Force Total Force’s performance in Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM but noted that physical fitness was

in need of improvement. He explained that while cycle ergometry was an acceptable test of fitness for its time, it was no longer suitable for “a much different Air Force today” given the demands of deployment. The general spoke of new physical training gear, of responsibility for fitness moving from the medical community to the “chain of command,” and of everyone passing what he termed the “commander’s eyeball test” of personal appearance.⁷

General Jumper followed in September with an article sub-titled “Are You Ready?” He said details of the new Air Force Fitness Program (AFFP) were being developed and urged everyone to be ready for the kick-off in January 2004.⁸ October’s “Assessing Our Fitness” article was his third but the first to explain how this latest initiative would be unlike any other. The chief spoke of changing Air Force culture, “instilling an expectation that makes fitness a daily standard.”⁹ In his fourth article entitled “Supporting Fitness,” penned on the eve of program implementation, General Jumper boldly declared that “an Air Force-wide culture change is underway.”¹⁰

Unfortunately, his assertion was only loosely supported by “feedback from the field . . . that airmen are taking the new fitness challenge seriously” and by a “30 percent increase in the use of our fitness centers in the last three months.”¹¹ To conclude culture change was underway was at best hopeful and at worst delusional. In the final “Fit to Fight” article on 8 January 2004, General Jumper addressed commanders, reiterating his conviction that “fitness of our airmen is a responsibility of command.” As well, the chief reaffirmed that a cultural change was taking place, stating, “Our mindset is changing to one more focused on our warrior culture.”¹²

The concept of *culture* is elusive, having different meanings depending on its context. It can denote any of the following: intellectual and moral faculties; expert care and training; enlightenment or excellence of taste; the values, conventions, or social practices of a field, activity, or society; or the product of cultivating living material, such as bacteria or viruses, in a

prepared nutrient media.¹³ In this discussion, the chief of staff was referring to the organizational culture of the United States Air Force, and by placing ownership for culture directly on commanders, he was also recognizing the key role leaders play in creating, maintaining, or in this case, changing culture. This is Schein's area of expertise.

Organizational Culture and Leadership

Prolific researcher, teacher, consultant, award-winning author, and US Army veteran,¹⁴ Edgar H. Schein is arguably the preeminent social psychologist of the day. His forte is organizational culture and leadership. In his book of the same name, Schein posits a conceptual model with which to consider the structure and functioning of the culture of an organization and the role that leadership plays within that culture. Many students of Professional Military Education (PME) are already familiar with "Schein's Pyramid," a staple of the leadership curriculum. The pyramid depicts the three qualitative levels of culture within an organization. Understanding the pyramid and knowing Schein's six primary embedding mechanisms arm leaders with the essential tools to effect culture change within their organizations.

Therein lies the vital ingredient for success--knowledge that culture and leadership are inextricably woven. As Schein says, they are "two sides of the same coin." Leaders create culture, and culture constrains, stabilizes, and provides structure and meaning to the organization's members, including its leaders.¹⁵ If elements of a culture become dysfunctional, leadership functions to perceive the need for and then to make needed change.¹⁶ Schein's bottom line for leaders is that they must manage the culture, or the culture will manage them.¹⁷ This point is particularly instructive. Good intentions notwithstanding, it is not enough to simply proclaim a cultural evolution is underway. Real change is a complex process, demanding a return to the original question regarding Fit to Fight: is it admin or ethos?

Thesis and Overview

Physical fitness is a fundamentally important part of military life,¹⁸ yet the Air Force has failed to embed fitness in its culture. In fact, through the years its fitness efforts have been the laughingstock of the US Armed Forces. The chief of staff attempted to reverse this tide with a brand new program in January 2004. Emphasizing a return to basics, Fit to Fight promised an altogether different approach to fitness, one that would embed it in the service's culture--a mighty tall order to be certain. Five years into the new program, surface indicators, such as increased fitness center foot traffic and robust and ascending fitness assessment pass rates, give reason for hope. But counter-indicators, a steadily rising obesity rate, for example, give cause for concern. Is the Air Force "Fit to Fight" Fitness Program admin or ethos? Said another way, has the Air Force realized the chief's goal of creating a service fitness culture?

To answer this question, this research study uses the work of renowned social psychologist Edgar H. Schein to analyze the extent to which fitness has been embedded in the Air Force culture. It explores fitness in the service today to establish a baseline for discussion (Chapter 2). Then, after describing salient features of Schein's Organizational Culture and Leadership model (Chapter 3), it leverages this conceptual framework to determine the degree to which fitness has been embedded in the service's culture (Chapter 4). It concludes by suggesting ways to facilitate the cultural change with respect to fitness the Air Force desires (Chapter 5). Recommendations involve modifying major fitness program elements and improving its accountability and support. It also explains how leaders can effect change using Schein's embedding mechanisms. Fitness is vital to effective military service. It needs to become part of a warrior ethos rather than be treated as just another administrative requirement. As such, this topic should be of general interest to all Airmen and of specific importance to all levels of Air Force leadership.

Notes

¹ *Merriam-Webster OnLine Dictionary*, s.v. “Laughingstock,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> (accessed 7 December 2008).

² Maj Benjamin A. Smart, “The Air Force Fitness Program: Are More Stringent Standards Needed?” Research Report (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 2002), 23.

³ Michael Hoffman, “PT Shape-up,” *Air Force Times*, 24 November 2008, 14.

⁴ Michael Hoffman, “55 Percent of Airmen Overweight,” *Air Force Times*, 30 April 2008, http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2008/04/airforce_fat_AF_042808w/ (accessed 5 December 2008).

⁵ Hoffman, “PT Shape-up,” 16.

⁶ Gen John P. Jumper, chief of staff of the United States Air Force, Chief’s Sight Picture, subject: Fit to Fight, 30 July 2003.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Gen John P. Jumper, chief of staff of the United States Air Force, Chief’s Sight Picture, subject: Fit to Fight #2 – Are You Ready? 9 September 2003.

⁹ Gen John P. Jumper, chief of staff of the United States Air Force, Chief’s Sight Picture, subject: Fit to Fight #3 – Assessing Our Fitness, 17 October 2003.

¹⁰ Gen John P. Jumper, chief of staff of the United States Air Force, Chief’s Sight Picture, subject: Fit to Fight #4 – Supporting Fitness, 12 December 2003.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Gen John P. Jumper, chief of staff of the United States Air Force, Chief’s Sight Picture, subject: Fit to Fight #5 – Message to Commanders, 8 January 2004.

¹³ *Merriam-Webster OnLine Dictionary*, s.v. “Culture,” (accessed 7 December 2008).

¹⁴ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), xv-xvi.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1.

¹⁶ Ibid., 22-23.

¹⁷ Ibid., 23.

¹⁸ United States General Accounting Office, *Gender Issues: Improved Guidance and Oversight Are Needed to Ensure Validity and Equity of Fitness Standards*, Report to the Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Readiness, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate (Washington, DC: US General Accounting Office, November 1998), 2.

Chapter 2

Fitness

The great advantage of the gain in moral force through all forms of physical training is that it is an unconscious gain. Willpower, determination, mental poise, and muscle control all march hand in hand with the general health and well-being of the man. Fatigue will beat men down as quickly as any other condition, for fatigue brings fear with it.

—S. L. A. Marshall, 1947

Physical fitness is an essential part of military service. In fact, many researchers and historians have put “combat advantage” at the top of the list of fitness’ benefits. In his research project at the Army War College, LTC Matthew Brown goes beyond the issue of its value, saying, “The question is not that physical fitness is important.” Instead, he attends to how fitness tests should be conducted and performance measured.¹ As has been established, cycle ergometry was not the answer, but is Fit to Fight? This chapter reviews the benefits of physical fitness, outlines the need for a fit force, describes the AFFP, and offers an initial answer to this question.

Benefits of Physical Fitness

Fitness benefits are undeniable. A fit lifestyle can foster gains in physical and psychological health, productivity, camaraderie, and combat readiness. Writing in “The Enlisted Perspective,” chief master sergeant of the Air Force, CMSAF Rodney McKinley, put it plainly: “A healthy lifestyle not only boosts energy levels, endurance, and reduces stress in every day duties; it can potentially save an Airman’s life in a deployed environment.”² He also pointed out the Air Force

spent \$3.9 billion on health care in 2006. A fit force would undoubtedly decrease these expenditures, he said, keeping Airmen “out of medical treatment facilities and on the job.”³

Many researchers have also commented on the benefits of fitness. Maj Lucille Warner, for instance, cited a 2000 report which found excess body weight contributed to more than 33,000 lost workdays for the Air Force per year at a cost exceeding \$4 million.⁴ Additionally, she noted the risk of premature death from being unfit increases 44 percent for men and 30 percent for women. Naturally, these figures climb when “unfit” is compounded by “fat.”⁵ Fitness has perceived value as well. Surveying 1,252 officer and enlisted PME students, Majs Torgeir Fadum and R. McReynolds found 92 percent felt strongly that fitness had significant psychological benefits, like improved attitude, better self image, and increased self-confidence.⁶

Furthermore, Maj Richard Gindhart summarized studies pointing to the positive effects of fitness, including decreased levels of anxiety, depression, fatigue, and confusion, and improved memory and cognition.⁷ Maj Denise Hollywood highlighted “teambuilding, unit cohesion, esprit de corps -- all of which are essential elements of the military culture,”⁸ while Majs James Lee, Dennis Murphy, and Donald Perkins emphasized the combat advantage.⁹ Julie Ballaro examined the effectiveness of the service’s fitness program in preparing personnel for the tasks and stress related to deployments in her 2002 doctoral dissertation.¹⁰ Her findings are illuminating.

Ballaro surveyed the attitudes and opinions of 580 Air Force active duty personnel and reservists who deployed in the January 2000 to May 2001 timeframe.¹¹ Two of her eight research questions focused on the relationship between individuals who exercise while deployed and the levels of stress or the severity of injuries and illnesses they experience while deployed.¹² With respect to the first question, she found a strong significant inverse relationship between exercise and levels of stress. Of the 64 percent of respondents who exercised while deployed,

only 29 percent reported experiencing “extreme stress.” On the other hand, 71 percent of the respondents who did not exercise said they faced “extreme stress” while deployed.¹³

As for the second question, Ballaro also found a strong “statistically significant relationship between individuals who returned . . . early [from deployment] due to illness or injuries and individuals who did not exercise while deployed.” Granted, sample size was small, but of the 89 early returners, 62--or 70 percent--did not exercise during their deployment. She said this finding suggests the ability to predict early returns from deployment,¹⁴ which may be of some value to senior leadership. The need for a fit force should be evident at this point, but many people who do not question the need for a fit “force” still question the need for a fit “air force.”

Need for a Fit Air Force

The predominant argument against the need for a fit Air Force is founded on the unique nature of the service. The Air Force, the argument goes, is unlike the other armed forces. Doctrine even formally acknowledges this fact: “air and space power operates in ways that are fundamentally different from other forms of military power.”¹⁵ This difference leads to a new way of thinking, what doctrine calls *airmindedness*: “The perspective of Airmen is necessarily different” and “much harder to convey than the perspectives of soldiers and sailors.”¹⁶

The downside to this uniqueness is that the Air Force’s identity has evolved over the years into one “based on the individual versus the team with a heavy emphasis on technology.”¹⁷ In his Air Command and Staff College research report, Maj David Hayen explained the inevitable consequence of this evolution: as the service matured into a technology-based force, it “moved further away from the idea that Airman’s [*sic*] jobs required the same fitness level as those of other services.”¹⁸ It would seem that the natural conclusion to all of this, then, is that the way the Air Force fights obviates the need for Airmen to be as fit as their sister service counterparts.

Surprisingly, Department of Defense (DoD) physical fitness policy formalizes this rationale, directing that “Individual Service members must possess the cardio-respiratory endurance, muscular strength and muscular endurance, together with desirable levels of body composition to successfully perform *in accordance with their Service-specific mission and military specialty*” (emphasis added).¹⁹ The Air Force mission is to wage war from afar, and as a result, very few of its enlisted specialties are inherently combat oriented. In this policy stipulation, DoD is in essence codifying an excuse for the service and its membership to not be physically fit. Unfortunately, far too many individual Airmen have adopted this excuse as their own.

Lt Col Frank Destadio put it bluntly: “The fitness level, particularly the aerobic capacity, of our military members relates directly to their ability to sustain themselves in combat.”²⁰ So what are unfit Airmen to do? Should they hope they never deploy, or if they do deploy, be grateful they chose the Air Force or ended up in one of its majority non-combat specialties? The service may be different, but it is also changing in response to a changing world, and those Airmen who think they do not need to be physically fit need to heed Lt Col Robert Barlow’s 1990 prescient warning: “Given the unpredictability of natural disasters, terrorist threats, and potential hostile uses of . . . lethal weapons, no one in uniform is exempt from the need for physical fitness. Air bases should not be considered the sanctuaries they may have been in the past.”²¹

Indeed, announcing Fit to Fight 13 years later, General Jumper described the “much different Air Force today” with members deploying to all regions of the world, living in tent cities, and operating in extremes of temperatures. He said Airmen are “subject to attack, and could be called upon to help defend the base, a trend that will surely increase in the growing expeditionary nature of our business.”²² Historical temporary duty (TDY) rates, as illustrated below, seem to support these comments and suggest Airmen are increasingly likely to deploy.

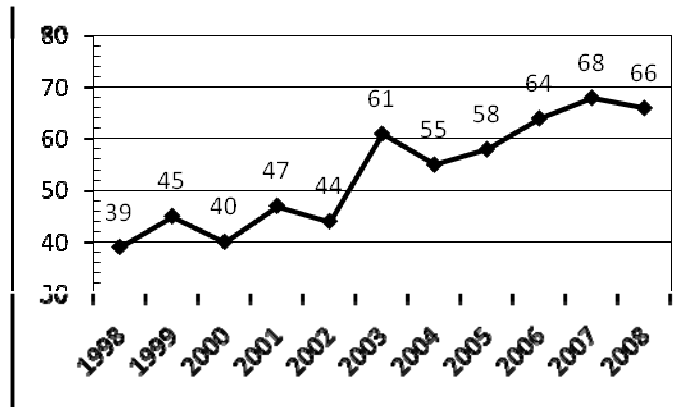


Figure 3. Air Force TDY Rates, Average Days, 1998-2008

Much of this boost in TDY activity is, in fact, deployment related. According to the Air Staff, approximately 8 percent of the active duty force is deployed at any one time directly supporting contingency operations worldwide. Since 11 September 2001, 243,615 Airmen have deployed, and among these, nearly 60,000 have deployed three or more times.²³

Did anyone foresee that Airmen from any specialty, not just transportation, would be driving US Army convoys in Iraq and Afghanistan? In early 2004 to bolster the shortage of soldiers, Airmen started augmenting Army forces in Iraq. At first, duties involved driving supply trucks, which is why only transporters were picked initially. The job expanded to driving gun trucks, and “driving” expanded to “rear seat” duties. This meant Airmen had to handle heavy weapons, such as grenade launchers, squad automatic weapons, and light machine guns.²⁴ This should serve to wake up those Airmen who have thus far ignored the call to be physically fit. All Airmen need to be fit for all of the benefits detailed herein. The AFFP provides an appropriate forum to make this happen. Airmen just need to take advantage of the opportunity.

Air Force Fitness Program

Air Force Instruction (AFI) 10-248, *Fitness Program*, governs the AFFP, the goal of which is to motivate all members to participate in a year-round conditioning program that emphasizes

total fitness, to include proper aerobic conditioning, strength/flexibility training, and healthy eating. The AFI directs commanders and supervisors to incorporate fitness into “culture,” establishing an environment for members to maintain fitness and health to meet expeditionary mission requirements.²⁵ The instruction covers the program broadly, including standards, assessments, exemptions, education and intervention, and administrative actions.

The backbone of the physical fitness program is commander-driven training, promoting aerobic and muscular fitness, flexibility, and optimal body composition.²⁶ The AFI says training should not be limited to the components of the test but rather should focus on overall fitness and on satisfying particular mission requirements. Commanders will ensure all members are permitted up to 90 minutes of duty time for physical fitness three times weekly. Furthermore, they will identify by written policy a unit-based program led by trained physical fitness leaders at least three times per week, specifying frequency of required individual participation.²⁷

Fitness assessments are conducted annually and scored from 0 to 100. A *composite* test entails all four components with points awarded as follows: aerobic, 50 points; body composition (waist measurement), 30 points; push-ups, 10 points; and abdominal crunches, 10 points.²⁸ Points are based on performance factoring in the individual’s gender and age. The minimum passing score is 75 points. Scores below 75 points are “poor” and require re-test within 43 to 90 days. Scores of 75 points or more are “good” and 90 points or more “excellent.”²⁹ Members with duty limiting conditions may be exempted from certain components of the test. In this case, a *component* assessment is conducted with scores based on the assessed components.³⁰ Ideally, all members will test on all four components but at a minimum will be tested on the waist measurement and aerobic component every 12 months. Members who pass an assessment without the aerobic component must be re-tested when the aerobic exemption expires.³¹

Prior to their fitness assessment, members complete a health screening questionnaire. Anyone who doubts their suitability to test based on their health must be deferred until cleared by a medical practitioner.³² All four components of the assessment should be conducted on the same day. Aerobic fitness is measured by a 1.5-mile timed run. Members medically exempted from the run but cleared for a sub-maximal test will be assessed on cycle ergometry. Different sub-maximal standards apply for non-active duty members, but the focus here is on the active force. A 3-mile walk is an allowable substitute test when the standard tests are not medically indicated or available, but commanders ultimately determine which test to use.³³

The Air Force provides education and intervention programs to members who fail their fitness assessment or exceed abdominal circumference standards. Members receiving a “poor” score attend a Healthy Living Program course and enter a mandatory Fitness Improvement Program.³⁴ “Poor” members whose waist measurement equals or exceeds 40 inches for males or 35 inches for females must also enroll in a Body Composition Improvement Program.³⁵

Finally, the AFI prescribes administrative and personnel actions for individuals who fail to meet fitness standards. Typically, these actions do not include nonjudicial punishment unless misconduct, such as failure to comply with program requirements versus failure to meet standards, is involved. Generally, commanders do not take action for first-time failures. Actions for subsequent failures range from verbal counseling to administrative separation. In fact, four “poor” scores in 24 months require commanders to make a retention or separation recommendation to the installation commander.³⁶ The AFFP covers all bases, but is it enough?

Success or Failure?

Since it was rolled out in January 2004, the AFFP has been modified three times--May 2005, July 2005, and September 2005--and underwent a complete revision in September 2006. The

revised program was subsequently modified in August 2007.³⁷ Recently, CMSAF McKinley announced that even more changes were in the offing. Speaking to the *Air Force Times*, he said senior leaders are re-examining the fitness program's effectiveness. "We are looking at everything," he reported, adding that "any portion [of the program] could be changed."³⁸

Viewed negatively, the constant changes to the AFFP represent desperation on the part of senior leaders to fix a fitness program they acknowledge to be failing. Viewed positively, the perpetual state of change shows good faith on the part of the Air Force to further improve the fitness program for the good of its Airmen. Taken together, these views beg the question, has Fit to Fight been a success or a failure? The answer as with most debates is an unequivocal "it depends." It depends on the objective against which success is measured. Compliance, fitness activity levels, and fitness assessment pass rates are three possible yardsticks.

In terms of compliance, the AFFP is a success. DoD Instruction 1308.3, *DoD Physical Fitness and Body Fat Programs Procedures*, stipulates four program elements: aerobic capacity, muscular strength, muscular endurance, and body fat composition.³⁹ The AFFP contains all four. DoD also directs the services to test personnel annually, develop a medical screening process to identify at-risk individuals, include wellness lifestyle enhancement concepts, ensure command support, conduct remedial training for members falling below prescribed standards, establish and maintain a data repository for tracking progress, and provide annual reports. On all counts, the AFFP complies. Finally, DoD authorizes duty time for exercise and encourages services to recognize outstanding performers.⁴⁰ AFI 10-248 leaves these measures to unit commanders.

If DoD were to nitpick the AFFP, it would focus on body fat composition. The Air Force does not have a body fat standard per se. It does, however, use the DoD's Body Mass Index (BMI) table, the results from which can be factored into the point computation for members

whose BMI is under 25.⁴¹ Otherwise, the service relies on a waist measurement alone for point computation and to signal health risk. The waist measurement is the most controversial aspect of the program. It does not account for height or muscle mass and comprises 30 percent of the total fitness assessment score. It can make or break a test.⁴² Nevertheless, the AFFP technically complies in that its body fat program suits “the particular needs and mission” of the service.

If an increase in fitness activity is the preferred metric, again Fit to Fight must be labeled a success judging by fitness center foot traffic. In his fourth Fit to Fight “Chief’s Sight Picture” penned barely six months after the first, General Jumper observed “a 30 percent increase in the use of our fitness centers in the last three months.”⁴³ Addressing Air War College students five years later, Brig Gen Darrell Jones, deputy chief of staff for Manpower and Personnel, Headquarters United States Air Force, reported base fitness center usage increased 23 percent as a result of the AFFP.⁴⁴ The inference is that Airmen are taking fitness seriously.

Finally, the most obvious standard against which the program should be judged is arguably the fitness assessment pass rate, and here again, the statistics seem to support a conclusion that Fit to Fight is a resounding success as the following table suggests:

Table 1. “Composite” Fitness Assessment Statistics, 2004-2007

Categories	2004	2005	2006	2007
Excellent (90-100)	16.1%	20.5%	26.4%	27.6%
Good (75-89.99)	71.3%	73.9%	67.9%	69.0%
Poor (<75)	12.6%	5.6%	5.7%	3.4%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Dr. Celan J. Alo, Medical Epidemiologist, Clinical Informatics Branch, Office of the United States Air Force Surgeon General, electronic mail, subject: Fitness Level Statistics, 11 November 2008.

In 2007, nearly 97 percent of those Airmen taking all four components of the test, that is, a “composite” assessment, achieved a passing score. This number is a significant improvement

over 2004 rates, when only 87 percent passed. Though the number of “good” scores remained generally the same from 2004 to 2007, “excellent” scores jumped from 16 to nearly 28 percent, and even more impressive, “poor” scores plummeted from nearly 13 to less than 4 percent.⁴⁵

On the surface, all three objective measures give cause for celebration, but looks can be deceiving. Compliance success only means Fit to Fight satisfies the basic requirements for fitness programs of the armed forces as stipulated by DoD. Increased fitness center usage could signify nothing more than Airmen taking advantage of the provision authorizing fitness during duty hours. In other words, hanging out at the gym is merely a popular alternative to working. Lastly, rising pass rates, though encouraging, may suggest the fitness standards are just too low.

To explain, though composite fitness assessment pass rates have risen from 2004 to 2007 as mentioned, the number of Airmen actually taking all four test components, as a percentage of the total force, is essentially unchanged as the figure below illustrates. Only 87.7 percent of the force in 2004, compared to 87.6 percent in 2007, took a composite fitness assessment.⁴⁶ The inflated pass rate, then, does not suggest a growing body of fit Airmen. Rather, it suggests that those Airmen who are composite testing have adapted to and are succeeding in the new standard.

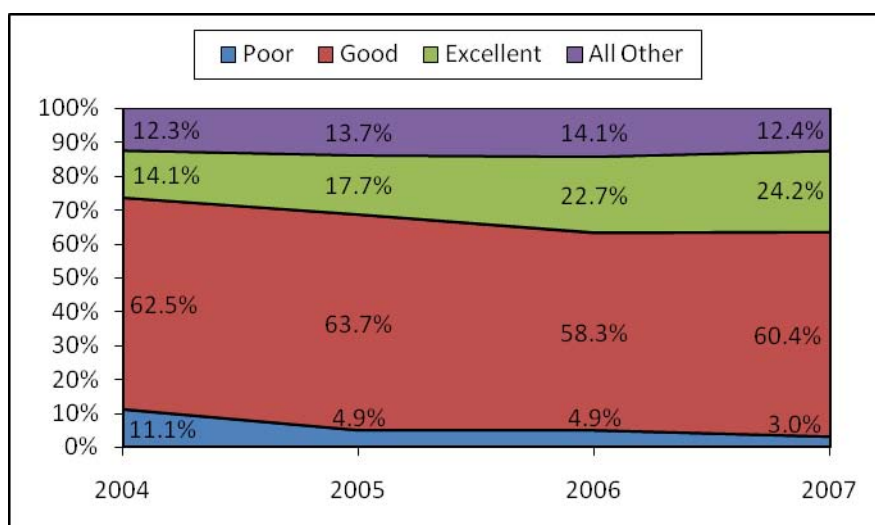


Figure 4. “Composite” Poors, Goods, Excellents, and All Others, 2004-2007

General Jumper stated his objective for Fit to Fight very clearly in his “Chief’s Sight Picture.” The objective of the new fitness program is culture change, changing the mindset of the Air Force such that fitness becomes a daily expectation for all Airmen. It is therefore this objective against which success of the program must be measured. Determining success, then, requires an analysis of Air Force culture, which begins with an understanding of organizational culture and leadership’s role therein.

Notes

¹ LTC Matthew J. Brown, “Fitness and Its Affects on the Military,” Research Report (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College, 2005), 1.

² CMSAF Rodney J. McKinley, chief master sergeant of the Air Force, The Enlisted Perspective, subject: Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle, 28 February 2008.

³ CMSAF Rodney J. McKinley, chief master sergeant of the Air Force, The Enlisted Perspective, subject: Importance of Physical Fitness, 21 May 2007.

⁴ Maj Lucille J. Warner, “USAF Physical Fitness Standards—Are They What a Fit Force Needs?” Research Report (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 2003), 1.

⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁶ Maj Torgeir G. Fadum and Maj R. Allen McReynolds, “Effectiveness of the Air Force Fitness Program,” Research Report no. 88-0880 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 1988), 18.

⁷ Maj Richard T. Gindhart, Jr., “The Air Force Fitness Program: Is It Adequate?” Research Report (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 1999), 7.

⁸ Maj Denise M. Hollywood, “Airman First – Can Fitness Play a Part?” Research Report (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 2001), 10.

⁹ Maj James H. Lee, Jr., Maj Dennis J. Murphy, and Maj Donald L. Perkins, “A New Air Force Physical Fitness and Weight Control Program,” Research Report no. 1405-80 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 1980), 1-3.

¹⁰ Julie Marie Ballaro, “The Effectiveness of the Air Force Fitness Program During Deployments” (PhD diss., Argosy University-Sarasota, 2002), 7.

¹¹ Ibid., iii.

¹² Ibid., 8.

¹³ Ibid., 119.

¹⁴ Ibid., 122.

¹⁵ Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2, *Operations and Organization*, 3 April 2007, 17.

¹⁶ Ibid., 18.

¹⁷ Hollywood, “Airman First,” 8.

¹⁸ Maj David C. Hayen, “Air Force Fitness – Back to Basics,” Research Report (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 2003), 7.

¹⁹ Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 1308.1, *DoD Physical Fitness and Body Fat Program*, 30 June 2004, 2.

Notes

²⁰ Lt Col Frank J. Destadio, "Peacetime Physical Fitness and Its Effect on Combat Readiness: An Air Force Perspective," Research Report (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College, 1991), 7.

²¹ Lt Col Robert A. Barlow, "The Air Force Fitness Program: An Application of the Gingrich 'Vision vs. Tactics' Test," Research Report (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air War College, 1990), 5.

²² Gen John P. Jumper, chief of staff of the United States Air Force, Chief's Sight Picture, subject: Fit to Fight, 30 July 2003.

²³ Brig Gen Darrell D. Jones, director of Force Management Policy and deputy chief of staff for Manpower and Personnel, Headquarters United States Air Force (address, Air War College, Maxwell AFB, AL, 22 August 2008).

²⁴ Ron Jensen, "U.S. Airmen Morph into Combat Roles, Providing Security for Convoys in Iraq," *Stars and Stripes*, 11 December 2004, <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=25967> (accessed 18 December 2008).

²⁵ Air Force Instruction (AFI) 10-248, *Fitness Program*, 25 September 2006, 1.

²⁶ Ibid., 2.

²⁷ Ibid., 10.

²⁸ Ibid., 20.

²⁹ Ibid., 21.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 22.

³² Ibid., 25.

³³ Ibid., 27-28.

³⁴ Ibid., 29.

³⁵ Ibid., 30.

³⁶ Ibid., 36, 74.

³⁷ Department of the Air Force, *Air Force Fitness Report*, 1 Jan 07 – 31 Dec 07, 5.

³⁸ Michael Hoffman, "PT Shape-up," *Air Force Times*, 24 November 2008, 14.

³⁹ Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1308.3, *DoD Physical Fitness and Body Fat Programs Procedures*, 5 November 2002, 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 3-7.

⁴¹ AFI 10-248, *Fitness Program*, 20.

⁴² Hoffman, "PT Shape-up," 15.

⁴³ Gen John P. Jumper, chief of staff of the United States Air Force, Chief's Sight Picture, subject: Fit to Fight #4 – Supporting Fitness, 12 December 2003.

⁴⁴ Jones, address, 22 August 2008.

⁴⁵ Dr. Celan J. Alo, Medical Epidemiologist, Clinical Informatics Branch, Office of the United States Air Force Surgeon General, electronic mail, subject: Fitness Level Statistics, 11 November 2008.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 3

Culture

Culture is an abstraction, yet the forces that are created in social and organizational situations that derive from culture are powerful. If we don't understand the operation of these forces, we become victim to them.

—Edgar H. Schein, 2004

Any attempt to analyze the culture of an organization would be pointless without first establishing a firm foundation of knowledge of the concept. As Schein admits, “culture is an abstraction,”¹ yet the consequences of failing to understand it can be devastating. This chapter highlights the aspects of Schein’s Organizational Culture and Leadership model essential for analyzing the Air Force’s culture with respect to fitness that follows in the next chapter.

Concepts and Relationships

Schein says that culture is both a dynamic phenomenon that surrounds an organization at all times, being constantly enacted and created by its member interactions and shaped by leadership behavior, and a set of structures, routines, rules, and norms that guide and constrain behavior.² Yet as important, and albeit complex, as this concept is to organizations and leaders, it is widely misunderstood. Some researchers use the term to refer to the “climate and practices that organizations develop around their handling of people, or to the espoused values and credo of an organization.” In this context, managers talk of cultures of “quality” or “customer service,” and consultants purport to be able to improve performance by creating the “right kind of culture.”³

But, these usages not only demonstrate an incorrect view of culture but a “dangerous tendency to evaluate particular cultures in an absolute way and to suggest that there actually are ‘right’ cultures for organizations.” Schein says that the value of a culture lies not in the culture alone but on the relationship of the culture to the environment in which it exists.⁴ He adds that the most intriguing aspect of culture is that it points to phenomena that are below the surface, that are “powerful in their impact but invisible and to a considerable degree unconscious.”⁵ It is ultimately leadership’s responsibility to manage organizational culture.⁶ In order to do this, leaders must first genuinely understand what culture means and how it operates.

Schein defines organizational culture as a “pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.”⁷ Without delving into a deep cultural analysis, which is reserved for the next chapter, this definition sheds some light on the Air Force’s current difficulties regarding fitness. The service historically has not had to adapt to the rigors of ground combat duty, which would require Airmen to be physically fit. As a result, fitness never became a shared basic assumption that could be passed on to new members.

Levels of Culture

Culture can be analyzed at three different levels in the Schein model, with the term *level* indicating the degree to which cultural phenomenon is visible to the observer.⁸ In analyzing an organization’s culture, it is important to differentiate these levels to fully comprehend the forces at work. Levels range from “the very tangible overt manifestations that one can see and feel to the deeply embedded, unconscious, basic assumptions” Schein sees as the essence of culture.⁹

At the surface is the level of artifacts, the phenomena that can be seen, heard, and felt. It includes such items as visible products, language, technology, style, published values, and observable rituals and ceremonies. For purposes of analysis, artifacts also include the processes and structural elements by which the behavior of an organization's members are made routine.¹⁰ Schein stresses that the most important point to be made about this level is that it is both easy to observe and difficult to decipher. He cautions against inferring deeper assumptions from artifacts alone as they would undoubtedly be colored by one's own feelings and reactions.¹¹

The middle level of culture contains the espoused beliefs and values. Typically, at least initially, beliefs and values reflect nothing more than what the group leaders want. These values and beliefs become shared knowledge when the group subjects them to some joint action then experiences success. The shared perception becomes shared beliefs and values and eventually shared assumptions.¹² Of course, this transformation is not always assured. First, beliefs and values must work reliably in solving the group's problems. Second, and more important especially if empirical testing is not possible, group members must perceive that the beliefs and values work, a process Schein refers to as *social validation*.¹³ As members reinforce each others' beliefs and values, they come to be taken for granted, entering the level of assumptions.¹⁴

The third and deepest level of organizational culture is the basic underlying assumptions. Here, beliefs and values become "so taken for granted," as a result of repeated success in implementing them, "that one finds little variation within a social unit."¹⁵ The consensus view toward these beliefs and values is so strongly held that members will find behavior based on any other premise inconceivable. Schein says that basic assumptions implicitly guide group member behavior and shape how members perceive, think, and feel. So deeply rooted, they "tend to be nonconfrontable and nondebtable, and hence extremely difficult to change."¹⁶

Obviously, the challenge for leaders lies at this third level. Changing culture means forcing members to reexamine basic underlying assumptions, but doing so temporarily destabilizes their cognitive and interpersonal worlds, releasing anxiety and defensiveness. Consequently, psychological defense mechanisms spring up at an unconscious level to block leaders' efforts to effect change. Because of this psychological connection, Schein likens this level of culture to an individual's genetics. Thus, the two key tasks involved in effecting successful cultural change are assessing the group's genetic potential for new learning and managing the concomitant anxiety released from the re-learning process.¹⁷ These tasks fall to the organization's leaders.

Role of Leaders

"Leadership and culture are conceptually intertwined," Schein informs.¹⁸ Leaders create culture, but once established, cultural norms define leadership within the organization. However, if the culture of the organization becomes maladapted or dysfunctional, the onus for change falls on the leader. It can be argued, then, that the supreme responsibility of leadership involves culture--creating it, managing it, and changing it when necessary. This does not imply cultural change is easy. Rather, it is a complex process only partially influenced by leader behavior.¹⁹

Nevertheless, if a change to organizational culture is required, it is incumbent upon the leadership of the organization to make it happen. Schein offers a succinct roadmap:

Culture change, in the sense of changing basic assumptions is, therefore, difficult, time-consuming, and highly anxiety-provoking--a point that is especially relevant for the leader who sets out to change the culture of the organization. The most central issue for leaders, therefore, is how to get at the deeper levels of a culture, how to assess the functionality of the assumptions made at that level, and how to deal with the anxiety that is unleashed when those levels are challenged.²⁰

Air Force leaders intent on realizing the chief's "Fit to Fight" vision should start by analyzing the extent to which it has already succeeded in embedding fitness in the service's culture.

Notes

¹ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 3.

² Ibid., 1.

³ Ibid., 7-8.

⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 25-26.

¹¹ Ibid., 26-27.

¹² Ibid., 28.

¹³ Ibid., 28-29.

¹⁴ Ibid., 29.

¹⁵ Ibid., 31.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 32.

¹⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 36-37.

Chapter 4

Analysis

After four years in this program, we believe the AFFP is succeeding in changing the culture of the AF to promote and improve health and fitness that enables a ready force.

—Air Force Fitness Report, 1 January 2007 - 31 December 2007

The 2007 Air Force Fitness Report proudly announced the good news that four years after its inception, the chief's of staff Fit to Fight program was succeeding in changing the culture of the service.¹ However, this assertion appears to be based on nothing more than wishful thinking, as the report fails to offer a substantive analysis of the Air Force's culture with respect to physical fitness. Using Schein's Organizational Culture and Leadership model, this chapter attempts to correct that shortcoming.

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of deciphering culture can range from pure research to providing a useful picture of an organization to its leaders who are engaged in a change project.² The latter is the purpose of this study of Fit to Fight--to answer the question of "admin or ethos" and to set the stage for recommendations to facilitate cultural embedding. Schein notes for the researcher that data gathering can be intrinsically difficult and involves a variety of choices and options along two dimensions of the process--level of researcher involvement with the organization and level of involvement of the organization's members in the research.³

This analysis involves low to medium qualitative involvement of the researcher and minimal subject involvement.⁴ It primarily takes a demographics approach, examining already available variables, such as surveys, statistics, research reports, editorials, and other documents. It also relies a great deal on participant observation. Schein cautions that there are risks inherent in cultural analysis, especially in judging the validity of the data gathered. Validity, he says, has two components: factual accuracy and interpretive accuracy.⁵ The real danger lies in the latter.

Interpretation of even the most objective data is subject to the biases of the observer. Further skewing the interpretation of an organization's culture may be an inability to effectively communicate it, as Schein points out, even with an intuitive understanding of it.⁶ Nevertheless, what follows is an analysis of the culture of the Air Force with respect to fitness to determine the extent of embedding five years into Fit to Fight. Again, the intent is to provide useful insight, along with recommendations, leaders can use toward achieving the vision of a fit force.

Levels of Fitness Culture

As a reminder, the essence of a group's culture is its "pattern of shared, basic taken-for-granted assumptions." However, the culture will "manifest itself at the level of observable artifacts and shared espoused beliefs and values."⁷ Air Force fitness can be analyzed on these three levels to arrive at some conclusions concerning the extent of embedding.

Artifacts

Artifacts comprise the surface level of culture and include all phenomena that one sees, hears, and feels when one encounters a group. They include the physical architecture of the environment, its language, its technology and products, its clothing, its published list of values, its observable rituals, and so on.⁸ The Air Force is rife with fitness artifacts.

The watchword “Fit to Fight” embodies the essence of the fitness artifact. General Jumper introduced the slogan in the summer of 2003, but it was never codified in the Air Force’s lexicon. Interestingly, it does not appear in the AFI, nor is it repeated in the annual Air Force fitness reports to the DoD. Yet, remarkably the term persists in the service’s vernacular. For example, in his August 2008 address to the Air War College, General Jones invoked the phrase in discussing quality of life programs.⁹ Likewise, in October 2008, the MacDill Air Force Base newspaper published an article entitled “6th SFS are *Fit to Fight* at Night” (emphasis added).¹⁰ Even a cursory search of the internet would undoubtedly turn up countless other references to “Fit to Fight” across the Air Force today.

Furthermore, Health and Wellness Centers (HAWC) symbolize the new thinking about fitness. “Gyms” became “Fitness Centers” became “HAWCs” illustrating the avowed growing emphasis on this aspect of Airmen’s lives. The AFFP also added a metaphorical chapter to the Air Force dictionary. Since January 2004, Airmen speak of Physical Training Leaders and Unit Fitness Program Managers (UFPM), of Healthy Living Programs, of Fitness Improvement Programs and Body Fat Composition Improvement Programs, of exemptions and overdues and acclimatization and re-tests,¹¹ and of duty limiting conditions.¹² These phrases are just some of the examples of the language, a cultural artifact, ushered forth by the new fitness program.

There are many other examples of fitness artifacts. Another obvious artifact unique to Fit to Fight is Physical Training (PT) gear.¹³ PT gear, which is an exercise uniform, was brand new to the Air Force and is the physical representation of the promised psychological change. In addition, Airmen’s behavior, specifically working out in their PT gear either alone or in loose formations of squadron personnel, serves as a visual artifact. The Air Force Fitness Management System, accessible by individual Airmen, UFPMs, and unit commanders, supports the fitness

program and constitutes a technological artifact of the “fitness culture.” Finally, the physical fitness assessment is an observable ritual of the program. Whether assessments are done individually, or as many organizations do, done en masse, fitness assessments clearly give the impression of an active fitness program to all who observe them.

Schein warns that it can be dangerous to try to infer the deeper assumptions about an organization’s culture from artifacts alone. Sometimes the meaning behind these artifacts only becomes clear over time. So, to more quickly achieve a level of understanding, he recommends turning to the espoused values, norms, and rules that guide group members’ behavior.¹⁴

Espoused Beliefs and Values

General Jumper and CMSAF McKinley unequivocally communicated to the Air Force new beliefs and values with respect to fitness applicable to the entire institution. The former talked of creating a “warrior culture”¹⁵ and made clear the focus was not just on passing a fitness test once a year.¹⁶ The latter echoed these comments. “Passing the annual fitness test is not the Air Force fitness goal,” he said, adding that Airmen must constantly hone their physical abilities “to withstand and overcome the demanding rigors of deployment and combat.”¹⁷

Additionally, in July 2007, the Air Force officially modified its officer and enlisted evaluation systems to incorporate individual fitness status. With the change, individuals who are not meeting fitness standards as of the closeout date of their performance report receive a referral report containing specific comments addressing their failure to meet standards.¹⁸ This policy change contributed to fulfilling the chief’s vision of increased accountability, which was mentioned in three of his five “Chief’s Sight Pictures,” and served to formalize the Air Force’s new fitness values. It follows in this level of culture that group member behavior begins to flow from the leaders’ espoused beliefs and values and will be observable at the artifacts level.¹⁹

But, for beliefs and values to transform into assumptions, they must be tested, they must work, and most important, the organization's members must perceive them as contributing to their success. Failing this, Schein explains that the espoused beliefs and values will "predict well enough what members will *say* in a variety of situations but . . . may be out of line with what they will actually *do* in situations in which those beliefs and values should, in fact, be operating" (emphasis in original).²⁰ Unfortunately, this description seems to fit the Air Force's situation with respect to fitness insofar as this study purports.

Have Airmen bought into the Air Force's message on fitness? Do they see the link between physical fitness and combat capability or individual performance in a deployment? If they perceive the link, is their understanding only theoretical, as in, the value of fitness is evident but not applicable to them or to their situation? Schein says that espoused beliefs and values often leave large areas of behaviors unexplained, "leaving us with a feeling that we understand a piece of the culture but still do not have the culture as such at hand."²¹ As a case in point, ponder the inverse relationship between fitness assessment pass rates and obesity rates mentioned earlier.

The analysis thus far suggests that fitness has not been embedded in Air Force culture. But, to know for sure requires another step. Deeper understanding of organizational culture requires an investigation of the Air Force's basic underlying assumptions regarding fitness.

Basic Underlying Assumptions

When solutions repeatedly work, members believe in their worth, and eventually the leaders' beliefs, values, and assumptions reflected in these solutions become embedded in the culture of the organization. They become basic shared assumptions that form the foundation of group member behavior. Schein points to two critical elements or measures that signal that the transformation to cultural embedding has occurred.

First, when culture is embedded, there will be little variation within a social unit, reflecting a considerable degree of consensus.²² For the Air Force, there should be at most negligible differences in fitness between squadrons, wings, or even Major Commands (MAJCOM). This is not the case. In a recent *Air Force Times* article, journalist Michael Hoffman reported on a wellness initiative by the Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC) called the Body Mass Reduction program, which yielded a 13 percent plunge in the command's obesity rate in one year.²³ Over the same year, the rate in two other MAJCOMs dropped but only very slightly, while in all other MAJCOMs, the rates actually rose as the following table depicts:

Table 2. Obesity Rates by Major Command, 2007-2008

Major Command	2007	2008	
Air Combat Command (ACC)	12.8%	12.9%	↗
Air Education and Training Command (AETC)	10.1%	10.0%	↘
Air Force District of Washington (AFDW)	11.4%	11.6%	↑
Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC)	12.2%	10.6%	↓
Air Force Space Command (AFSPC)	12.0%	12.1%	↗
Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC)	12.2%	12.3%	↗
Air Mobility Command (AMC)	12.5%	12.6%	↗
Pacific Air Forces (PACAF)	13.3%	13.4%	↗
US Air Forces in Europe (USAFE)	13.1%	13.0%	↘

Source: Michael Hoffman, "Body Mass Reduction Program Helps AFMC Lose Weight," *Air Force Times*, 24 November 2008, 16.

AFMC's program focuses on BMI, a departure from the AFFP standard which concentrates on waist measurement and PT test scores.²⁴

Second, Schein explains that when culture is embedded, assumptions become shared, and group members thus find behavior based on any other premise inconceivable.²⁵ In Air Force terms, a culture of fitness would imply near total compliance with fitness standards. In the strictest sense of the AFFP, "compliance" equates to passing the annual composite fitness assessment. Recall that "composite" means that members have taken all four components of the

fitness test. Table 3 depicts the dichotomy of two broad fitness categories, “Composite Test Pass” and “All Others,” which incorporates composite test failures, component tests, individuals exempt from testing, and individuals overdue for testing, from 2004 to 2007.

Table 3. Fitness Categories, “Composite Test Pass” vs. “All Others,” 2004-2007

Categories	2004	2005	2006	2007
Composite Test Pass	76.6%	81.4%	81.0%	84.6%
All Others	23.4%	18.6%	19.0%	15.4%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Dr. Celan J. Alo, Medical Epidemiologist, Clinical Informatics Branch, Office of the United States Air Force Surgeon General, electronic mail, subject: Fitness Level Statistics, 11 November 2008.

The “All Others” category--Airmen who have not passed the fitness test while taking all four components--has averaged more than 19 percent in the first four years of the program. In real terms, this equals nearly 60,000 Airmen. Granted, though the general trends are very positive, with composite test passes increasing and all other categories decreasing, it is clear that not all members of the organization find behavior based on any other premise “inconceivable,” and it would be “inconceivable” to try to argue in light of this data that fitness is embedded in Air Force culture. Table 4 shows fitness categories in greater detail.

Table 4. All Fitness Categories, 2004-2007

Categories	2004	2005	2006	2007
Excellent (90-100)	14.1%	17.7%	22.7%	24.2%
Good (75-89.99)	62.5%	63.7%	58.3%	60.4%
Poor (<75)	11.1%	4.9%	4.9%	3.0%
Exempt	6.1%	5.5%	5.5%	3.7%
Overdue	4.0%	5.8%	5.3%	6.3%
Component	2.2%	2.4%	3.3%	2.4%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Dr. Celan J. Alo, Medical Epidemiologist, Clinical Informatics Branch, Office of the United States Air Force Surgeon General, electronic mail, subject: Fitness Level Statistics, 11 November 2008.

Determination

Is fitness embedded in Air Force culture? The preceding analysis leads one to conclude it is not, at least not yet. Five years into Fit to Fight, many Airmen still approach fitness as they do any other administrative program instead of as part of a warrior ethos top Air Force leadership envisioned. Cultural embedding implies a congruence between thought and action at an unconscious level. Beliefs and values committed to assumptions should be so ingrained that they become second nature. This congruence does not exist; rather, disconnects abound.

For example, the segment of personnel overdue for testing rose 57.5 percent from 2004 to 2007. When support units close for fitness training, customers assume those members are shirking their more important duty--doing their jobs. On a policy level, "comments referencing individual fitness assessment score, category of fitness or behavior associated with the fitness program are not allowed" in performance reports unless Airmen do not meet standards.²⁶ For individuals failing a test, the AFI prohibits administrative action for first failures, mandates education courses, and allows 90 days for unfit Airmen to get into shape before re-testing. Why is such slack offered when the expectation is that all Airmen will be in shape--at all times?

If fitness were embedded in culture, leaders would recognize and remedy these inconsistencies. Taking it a step farther, these situations would not even exist in a fitness culture, for seasoned members would inculcate newcomers as they join the organization. Indeed, fitness has not been embedded in the Air Force culture. Artifacts are numerous and visible, beliefs and values have been articulately espoused, but senior leaders' assumptions about fitness have definitely not transformed into shared assumptions and consequently become a part of the culture. The question remains, what is to be done? Accepting the value of a fit Air Force, the focus needs to shift to program changes and leadership actions that will culturally embed fitness.

Notes

- ¹ Department of the Air Force, *Air Force Fitness Report*, 1 Jan 07 – 31 Dec 07, 5.
- ² Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 203.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 203-204.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 204.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 222.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.
- ⁹ Brig Gen Darrell D. Jones, director of Force Management Policy and deputy chief of staff for Manpower and Personnel, Headquarters United States Air Force (address, Air War College, Maxwell AFB, AL, 22 August 2008).
- ¹⁰ A1C Katherine B. Holt, “6th SFS are Fit to Fight at Night,” *Air Force Print News Today*, 2 October 2008, http://www.macdill.af.mil/news/story_print.asp?id=123118024 (accessed 8 January 2009).
- ¹¹ Air Force Instruction (AFI) 10-248, *Fitness Program*, 25 September 2006.
- ¹² AFI 10-203, *Duty Limiting Conditions*, 25 October 2007.
- ¹³ Gen John P. Jumper, chief of staff of the United States Air Force, Chief’s Sight Picture, subject: Fit to Fight, 30 July 2003.
- ¹⁴ Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 27.
- ¹⁵ Gen John P. Jumper, chief of staff of the United States Air Force, Chief’s Sight Picture, subject: Fit to Fight #5 – Message to Commanders, 8 January 2004.
- ¹⁶ Gen John P. Jumper, chief of staff of the United States Air Force, Chief’s Sight Picture, subject: Fit to Fight #3 – Assessing Our Fitness, 17 October 2003.
- ¹⁷ CMSAF Rodney J. McKinley, chief master sergeant of the Air Force, The Enlisted Perspective, subject: Importance of Physical Fitness, 21 May 2007.
- ¹⁸ Message, 111525Z JUL 07, US Air Force to All Air Force, 11 July 2007.
- ¹⁹ Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 29.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² *Ibid.*, 31.
- ²³ Michael Hoffman, “Body Mass Reduction Program Helps AFMC Lose Weight,” *Air Force Times*, 24 November 2008, 16.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 31.
- ²⁶ Message, 111525Z JUL 07.

Chapter 5

Recommendations

The level of attention and resourcing to support [Air Force Materiel Command's] initiative is really part of what we need to do as an Air Force to take on issues that impact our readiness, productivity and quality of life.

—Maj Dana Whelan, 30 April 2008

In extolling the Air Force Materiel Command's highly successful Body Mass Reduction program, Major Whelan, deputy chief of Health Promotions, Air Force Medical Operations Agency, inadvertently touched on two of Schein's six primary embedding mechanisms--attention and resourcing--that are available to leaders to effect cultural change. Before describing these, the other embedding mechanisms, and the recommendations that flow from them, this chapter first recommends changes the Air Force needs to make to the fitness program to remove some of the institutional barriers standing in the way of cultural embedding.

Program Changes

"Changes are coming,"¹ CMSAF McKinley promised, but he did not offer specifics nor a timeline. Unfortunately, neither did the Air Staff Personnel and Manpower Directorate, who said only that "programs and policies are constantly under review and revision; however, CSAF has not approved any recent changes."² The Air Force Audit Agency is formally evaluating the AFFP. As of mid-November 2008, their project was in "application," or evidence gathering, status.³ Results of the audit are not expected to be made public though until November 2009.⁴

It is no coincidence the AFFP is being audited. The CMSAF actually requested it. He no doubt recognized, as most Airmen have, the current program's inherent shortcomings. Changes are needed to major program elements and the system of accountability and support. Unless modified, these flaws will continue to impede efforts to embed fitness in the Air Force culture.

Major Program Elements

Changes to four major fitness program elements will bolster acceptance and help facilitate cultural embedding. First, the Air Force would garner huge, instantaneous praise by removing the waist measurement from the fitness assessment score computation. The waist measurement, which comprises 30 percent of the total score, is considered the most controversial aspect of the program, according to CMSAF McKinley, and can make or break a PT test. Some Airmen claim it penalizes height, making it impossible for taller individuals to max the test. As a result, the Air Force started awarding full points for BMIs under 25, the overweight threshold. This helped taller Airmen, but then came complaints over how BMI does not account for muscle mass.⁵

In short, there is no satisfactory way around the waist measurement quandary. Therefore, it must be removed from the scheme entirely. The ensuing 30-point gap can be filled by increasing crunches and push-ups to 25 points each. Many Airmen agree the 10-point value diminishes the importance of these strength components. In its place, the Air Force needs to revive the old Weight and Body Fat Management Program (WBFMP). It used height, weight, and body fat to determine if Airmen met standards and even provided for medical waivers for muscle mass. Airmen not meeting standards were expected to lose a percentage of body fat or a number of pounds per month. The focus of the new WBFMP would be on health, not on a point score.

Second, the Air Force must mandate more frequent fitness assessments; quarterly testing is ideal. Researchers have been recommending this for some years now. In 1980, Lee, Murphy,

and Perkins argued for quarterly assessments.⁶ In their 1988 survey of PME students, Fadum and McReynolds' reported that 48 percent of respondents supported quarterly testing and another 30 percent preferred a semi-annual schedule.⁷ CMSAF McKinley encouraged on-the-spot testing, an authority commanders rarely use.⁸ This authority must be inherent, for it is not explicitly mentioned in the AFI. Regardless, this step is draconian. Annual testing is simply insufficient to "motivate" Airmen who are not otherwise already so motivated. Quarterly testing is the ideal solution as it parallels most Airmen's training cycles in preparing for the annual test.

Third, the Air Force needs to make a 3-mile timed run the new aerobic standard. This recommendation complements more frequent testing. The Air Force's 1.5-mile timed run of the 1990s was replaced by cycle ergometry following a number of injuries and deaths.⁹ Some researchers have labeled this phenomenon "gutting it out," explaining that the distance was not so far nor the standards too high to prohibit an unfit Airman from just gutting out the test once a year. Lee, Murphy, and Perkins believe a 3-mile run requires legitimate conditioning and will eliminate the temptation of unconditioned individuals to overextend themselves.¹⁰ Additionally, a run of this distance requires endurance, which both Destadio¹¹ and Gindhart¹² cite as the first physical requirement of combat. Along with this change, the Air Force needs to replace cycle ergometry with a 3-mile timed walk as the sub-maximal aerobic standard for the same reasons.

Fourth, the Air Force needs to mandate use of the AF Form 1975, Fitness Improvement Activity Log - Aerobic Training, or create a similar form for Airmen and mandate its use. The idea would be to have Airmen document their daily fitness activities in full detail--type of event, distance, duration, etc--and submit that record to the UFPD monthly. In the event of a fitness failure, it would be glaringly obvious to the commander what happened and would add a whole new dimension of accountability in the program with respect to "individual responsibility."

Accountability and Support

Under the old WBFMP, failure to meet standards triggered automatic, predetermined career consequences. Promotion, reenlistment, and assignment status were all jeopardized to some extent by virtue of being in the program, whether initially identified as not meeting standards, not meeting standards but making progress, or not meeting standards and not making progress. For example, enlisted personnel making unsatisfactory progress were ineligible for promotion.¹³ They could not test, or if they tested, would not have their test scored. If they had a line number, the stripe would be “red-lined.” Enlisted personnel in the program but within standards had promotions temporarily withheld.¹⁴ Promotion consequences for officers were discretionary.

Another example of the link between weight and body fat standards and personnel actions is reenlistments. The AFI was clear: “Airmen may not reenlist unless they meet and maintain established body fat standards.”¹⁵ Also, re-attaining standards did not automatically restore reenlistment eligibility; that decision belonged to the commander. They could, however, be extended for the number of months required to achieve standards, assuming minimum satisfactory progress was reached each month.¹⁶ Finally, all members not meeting weight and body fat standards were ineligible to attend PME, whether by TDY or permanent change of station (PCS), and were ineligible for PCS if making unsatisfactory progress in the program.¹⁷

The WBFMP was supported by a set of codes that personnelists would update into the Military Personnel Data System (MilPDS). These codes triggered related personnel actions. The AFFP has no system codes hence no association with MilPDS, so all previous accountability links have been broken. Personnel actions completely fall to commanders, who are without benefit of supporting system prompts. Making matters worse, the majority of unit commanders no longer have personnel staffs. The personnel career field took a 39 percent reduction in authorizations to help fund recapitalization of aging weapon systems. As a result of the cuts,

commander support staffs were centralized,¹⁸ leaving commanders virtually on their own. This situation has undoubtedly produced tremendous disparities in fitness program management between units and overall inequities in how the consequences of fitness failure are applied.

The Air Force needs to restore this support and the links to accountability. Currently, there is too much “gray” in the area of fitness failure consequences and the enforcement thereof. As will be evident in the next section, punishments, as with rewards, serve to embed culture. So, the recommendations in this section, should they be implemented, would help facilitate the cultural change the Air Force wants. But, change at the institutional level is not essential for leaders to start making a difference. Leaders at all levels have a good number of tools at their disposal to reinforce the value of fitness. Schein refers to these tools as primary embedding mechanisms.

Embedding Mechanisms

Leaders have a variety of resources available to reinforce the adoption of new beliefs, values, and assumptions. Taken together, the six primary embedding mechanisms represent the major tools leaders use to teach their organizations to perceive, think, feel, and behave based on their own convictions and to subsequently reinforce this new learning. These mechanisms are presented sequentially, but as Schein notes, they operate simultaneously to create what would typically be called the “climate” of the organization.¹⁹ This is important to understand, because many of the recommendations that follow--due to the overlapping nature of the mechanisms--could be categorized in more than one embedding mechanism.

Two other points must be stressed up front. First, the generic term *leaders* is preferred in this discussion, for the majority of the recommendations below apply to most if not all levels of leadership, including supervisory, enlisted, officer, command, staff, senior, and senior Air Force leadership. Second, and more important, these tools enable leaders to take action now to help

embed fitness in the service's culture. Though some of these recommendations require action by the Air Force, others only require leaders who care enough to start making a difference.

Attention, Measurement, and Control

Schein says that one of the most powerful mechanisms leaders have available for communicating what they believe in or care about ranges from what “they notice and comment on to what they measure, control . . . and in other ways *deal with systematically*” (emphasis in original).²⁰ Even casual remarks or questions geared toward a certain area can be as potent as formal mechanisms and measurements if applied consistently. In addition, members of the organization will learn by what leaders do not pay attention to and by conflicts or inconsistencies they detect, whether or not intended by the leader.²¹

Leaders can pay attention to the fitness program in a variety of ways. Making it a regular feature at commander's calls or a topic at staff meetings would both be effective ways to keep fitness high on everyone's scope. Commanders need to publish fitness metrics covering all categories of fitness, not just individuals who tested. In so doing, they will focus attention squarely on the 15 percent of the population who have not passed a composite test. Additionally, commanders have the inherent responsibility to enforce standards, and one such standard is performance feedback. “Physical fitness” appears on all three Air Force feedback forms, and by ensuring feedback gets done, commanders will also be reinforcing the importance of fitness.

Commanders can also convey the value of fitness by associating it with readiness. Warner in fact suggested making fitness a Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS) reportable category.²² SORTS is a central registry of data assessing the effectiveness of all operational units of the US Armed Forces and providing information critical for deliberate and crisis action planning.²³ Adding fitness to monthly SORTS reports would reinforce its link to readiness and

undoubtedly ramp up heat on the program. Barlow recommended another way to ramp up the heat--commander accountability. He argues that senior leaders must select commanders willing and able to lead their assigned personnel to the requisite levels of fitness and then absolutely hold those commanders responsible for the physical fitness of their units.²⁴

This issue of accountability extends to organizations as well, and the mechanism for organizational accountability is the unit compliance inspection. Shockingly, MAJCOMs “do not generally inspect AF Fitness Programs as part of their inspections,” according to the Air Force Office of the Inspector General (IG).²⁵ To embed fitness in culture, the Air Force has to pay more attention to it. It must direct MAJCOMs to add the fitness program to its compliance checklists and to begin inspecting it on their next round of IG visits.

Reaction to Critical Incidents and Crises

What defines “critical” is partly a matter of perception. Obviously, actual dangers or threats from the external environment qualify, but for immediate purposes, the concern is more with what leaders believe to be a crisis. Schein explains that the manner in which leaders and others deal with crises “creates new norms, values, and working procedures and reveals important underlying assumptions.” Crises trigger anxiety, and the need to reduce anxiety is a “powerful tool for new learning.” Emerging from a heightened emotional state with new behaviors that help reduce the anxiety created by a crisis is very likely to either be repeated or to shape other behaviors in the hope of avoiding recurrence of the crisis.²⁶

In the context of the fitness program, the failure of an Airman to maintain standards most assuredly counts as a “crisis.” In general, leaders react to failures in one of two ways: they do nothing or they do something. Leaders who turn a blind eye to failures send a powerful message that fitness is not important. Regardless of what they may say in official settings, what they

actually do privately toward failures will speak volumes for their underlying assumptions about fitness. Leader disinterest in fitness will spread throughout the unit, guiding members' behaviors and attitudes toward the fitness program. In a sense, not only will fitness not be embedded in the organization, but beliefs and values counter to fitness will take root over time.

Whereas, leaders--commanders and supervisors--who do something about failures send a strong message reinforcing the importance of physical fitness. In the "rehabilitative" spirit of the program, leaders should rally unit members to assist colleagues who fail a fitness assessment. This includes ensuring they attend required wellness enhancement courses and participate in the mandatory fitness improvement program. If, despite this team approach, an Airman should repeatedly fail to meet standards, the leaders' reactions become that much more critical. The best advice for commanders simply is to consistently enforce the rules of the program.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the fitness AFI lays out a range and timing of administrative actions for fitness failures. Accountability is ingrained in the culture of the military. Airmen expect that when members breach standards, they will be held accountable. Fitness is a standard, and especially over the last five years, the Air Force has said fitness is an important standard. Therefore, it is vital commanders take actions consistent with policy. Administrative actions are designed to be rehabilitative, but the ultimate test occurs when an Airman reaches a fourth "poor" score in a 24-month period. Will the commander initiate administrative separation?

Because management of the fitness program varies widely between units, there is no way to know for sure how many Airmen fall into the category of potential discharges. However, if the number of finalized discharges for failure to meet fitness standards is any indicator, the inference is obvious--commanders are "soft on crime." According to Maj David Houghland, chief of Air Reserve Component (ARC) Training at the Air Force Judge Advocate General School who

maintains the Web-based Administrative Separations Program (WASP) database, of the 11,408 enlisted discharges since 2004, only 77--or 0.67 percent--have been for fitness failures. Figure 5 shows the number of enlisted discharges since 2004 for both fitness and non-fitness reasons.²⁷

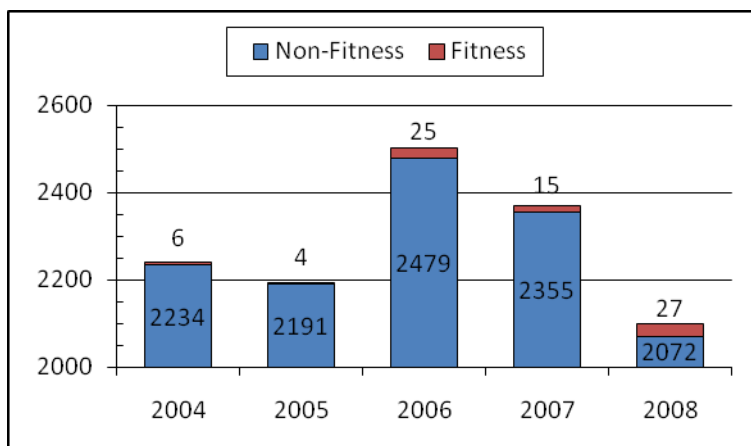


Figure 5. Enlisted Discharges, Non-Fitness and Fitness, 2004-2008

WASP does not report officer data. Even if it did, it would be impossible to draw definitive conclusions about the fitness program from discharge data alone. This information would be more useful if depicted as a cycle--from the pool of discharge candidates to commander-initiated discharge actions to the number of completed discharges--but such is not available at present. Nevertheless, considering that enlisted discharges for fitness failure have only exceeded one percent of total enlisted discharges once in the last five years, one could argue that commanders need to make a more concerted effort to enforce program rules. In so doing, their reaction to the “critical incidents” of failures will reinforce the Air Force’s beliefs and values on fitness.

Allocation of Resources

Schein posits, “The creation of budgets in an organization is another process that reveals leader assumptions and beliefs.”²⁸ In other words, what a leader funds reflects what a leader values. The terms *budgets* and *funds* are generally taken to mean money, but in a real sense

consider that “time” is a valuable resource as well. The popular aphorism, “put your money where your mouth is,” aptly captures the essence of this mechanism.

Announcing plans to renovate or construct 36 fitness centers to support the fitness program, General Jumper said, “Allocating resources shows our commitment to fitness and our Fit to Fight effort.”²⁹ He must have read Schein. Indeed, the service generously allocated monies for fitness centers and for new PT gear as well, but it could do more. One of the most glaring inconsistencies in the fitness program is the fact that its managers are assigned their roles as an additional duty. AFI 10-248 describes the UFPM as a “unit member who is responsible to the commander for the unit fitness program. . . . Access to, and experience with, MILPDS is highly desirable. This is an *additional duty* and not a primary AFSC” (emphasis added).³⁰

Certainly, if fitness were already a part of the service culture, a part-time program manager would be adequate. But, this was not the situation for the Air Force. What message is sent, then, when a program supposedly representing indispensable values that senior leaders are trying to culturally embed does not assign duty for managing the program as a primary responsibility? Commanders have the power to correct this mistake in their units if deemed necessary. But, the Air Force also needs to fix this, and part of the solution involves reversing the actions that cut the personnel career field. The reference to “MILPDS,” the system tool of the personnel trade mentioned earlier--suggests Air Force leadership had intended all along for UFPM duty to reside in the commanders’ personnel support staff. It is possible the Air Force, knowing what lay ahead for personnelists, intentionally dissociated them from this duty. But, not primarily assigning the duty to somebody was ill-advised, sent the wrong message, and is counter to cultural embedding.

Time is another resource, but critics argue that moving to quarterly testing, especially tests involving a run of twice the current distance, will strain units, who are already strapped for time

given the current operations tempo. This criticism is overstated. The current fitness AFI requires commanders to ensure “all members are permitted up to 90 minutes of DT [duty time] for PT 3 times weekly.”³¹ So, duty time is already allocated by order of the Air Force. Unit commanders just need to designate one of these sessions every three months for testing. Some units, in fact, already conduct monthly mock fitness assessments to keep their members sharp.³² Therefore, changing the assessment requirement to quarterly would not burden units.

Finally, regarding exercise on duty, while the Air Force should be lauded for authorizing duty time for physical fitness, it must take the next step--make it mandatory. Several researchers concur. Ballaro found tremendous support from survey respondents, who agreed a “mandatory program would ensure that everyone is offered an equal opportunity to exercise on duty.”³³ To Gindhart, mandatory participation is a cornerstone of an effective physical fitness program,³⁴ and Hollywood feels three workouts should be “a mandatory part of the workweek.”³⁵ Here again, commanders do not have to wait for official sanction from the Air Force. They should immediately mandate a duty exercise program. Allocating this kind of time, a valuable resource, would convey how strongly they feel about fitness, further facilitating cultural embedding.

Role Modeling, Teaching, and Coaching

Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching--what the Air Force calls “mentoring”--are potent tools of embedding. One would hope leaders are aware that visible behavior is a powerful way to convey values, beliefs, and assumptions to other members, especially newcomers. Even more critical than formal approaches, Schein stresses “informal messages are the more powerful teaching and coaching mechanism,”³⁶ so the opportunities for reinforcement are plentiful.

Leaders can help embed fitness into Air Force culture by living the example, and this is not limited to any one area. Regarding the mandatory duty exercise program recommended above,

commanders should not only enforce the requirement but comply with it as well. Imagine the positive thoughts running through an Airman's mind when given a chance to work out with his or her commander. In enforcing and complying with the feedback program, commanders are again providing critical role modeling, teaching, and coaching. Last, and certainly not least, leaders need to take and pass the fitness test and maintain a fit and healthy lifestyle. Though shameful to admit, every Airman can point to examples of leaders who do not "walk the walk."

Describing the challenges of colonel assignments to an Air War College audience in November 2008, a representative of the Air Force Colonel Management Office acknowledged that 25 percent of active duty colonels are "non-deployable."³⁷ It is not entirely clear what he meant by the term. Literally, "non-deployable" denotes individuals who are coded as Assignment Limitation Code (ALC)-C3, which according to AFI 41-210, *Patient Administration Functions*, means "Non-Deployable/Assignment limited to specific CONUS installations based on medical need. . . . designates members who should not be deployed or assigned away from specialty medical capability required to manage their unique medical condition."³⁸

There are two other ALC-Cs, C1 and C2. The former identifies individuals with temporary or mild conditions requiring medical follow-up but whose condition is unlikely to cause serious impact if untreated or if treatment is limited during periods of deployment or assignment. The latter is used to describe individuals with slightly more serious medical conditions but who could be deployed for short periods of time.³⁹ Across the service, ALC-Cs are simply not that far reaching. Fewer than 7,700 personnel in the ranks of colonel and below, or about 2.3 percent of the force, have documented medical conditions which restrict their ability to deploy or to be reassigned. However, as Table 5 reveals, the limitations, though modest in number, are disproportionately represented in the senior enlisted and officer ranks.

Table 5. Assignment Limitation Codes (ALC) “C” (9 December 2008)

Grade	Strength	% Strength	C1	C2	C3	% C3	ALC-Cs	% ALC-Cs
E1	12,276	3.7%	2	2	1	0.0%	5	0.0%
E2	6,641	2.0%	1	1	0	0.0%	2	0.0%
E3	47,408	14.4%	21	39	4	0.0%	64	0.1%
E4	49,160	14.9%	132	218	26	0.1%	376	0.8%
E5	68,992	21.0%	502	725	94	0.1%	1,321	1.9%
E6	42,259	12.8%	783	1,099	182	0.4%	2,064	4.9%
E7	26,476	8.1%	770	914	162	0.6%	1,846	7.0%
E8	5,528	1.7%	152	148	30	0.5%	330	6.0%
E9	2,728	0.8%	83	101	13	0.5%	197	7.2%
O1	9,352	2.8%	4	9	0	0.0%	13	0.1%
O2	7,422	2.3%	12	32	7	0.1%	51	0.7%
O3	22,467	6.8%	113	251	34	0.2%	398	1.8%
O4	14,161	4.3%	131	319	42	0.3%	492	3.5%
O5	10,415	3.2%	110	216	35	0.3%	361	3.5%
O6	3,814	1.2%	49	96	23	0.6%	168	4.4%
	329,099	100.0%	2,865	4,170	653	0.2%	7,688	2.3%

Source: Air Force Personnel Center Secure Applications Web site, IDEAS, https://w11.afpc.randolph.af.mil/RAW/asp/SecBroker/Drivers/Sec_BrokerTransfer.aspx?_program=IDEAS (accessed 9 December 2008).

As is evident, only 0.6 percent of colonels are non-deployable (C3), so the figure cited does not correspond with data on file. But, this is entirely beside the point. Something is creating the perception, and where organizational culture and leadership are concerned, perception is reality. The essence of this mechanism is leaders setting the example. Fitness will never reach the level of underlying assumptions, which is to say will never be culturally embedded, until senior enlisted and officer leaders provide more convincing examples for others to follow. They would do well to take to heart the words of Gen George S. Patton: “You are always on parade.”

Allocation of Rewards and Status

Leaders can forcefully convey their own priorities, values, and assumptions by “consistently linking rewards and punishments to the behavior they are concerned with.” Both the nature of

the behavior being addressed and the nature of the rewards and punishments themselves carry messages, but the key is actual practice, “not what is espoused, published, or preached.” Learning occurs only if a system of rewards and status, consistent with the leaders’ values and assumptions, is being practiced. However, any inconsistencies, such as rewarding behaviors that reflect counter-values, will result in a conflicted organization.⁴⁰

Hardliners argue against offering rewards for exceptional fitness performance, insisting Airmen should simply accept that the responsibility to be fit is inherent in their profession. Others question the value of rewards as a motivator. Hayen cites a 2000 survey of 8,572 military personnel mirroring the DoD population. When asked what types of motivation would increase fitness activity, 35 percent of the respondents said “nothing.”⁴¹ However, half of these same respondents claimed to be exercising at least three times each week already. For those members not so inclined, rewards may be of some value in motivating fitness behavior. To the extent they could aid cultural embedding, as Schein suggests, rewards should at least be considered.

The DoD directs the services to assist in motivating members toward achieving high fitness standards by recognizing personnel “who attain outstanding levels of physical fitness and/or make substantial improvement.”⁴² The special pass is a time-honored reward commanders have at their disposal. Unit commanders may award 3- or 4-day passes for special occasions or circumstances, such as for recognition.⁴³ There is precedent for this action in the area of enlisted specialty training, where commanders have long awarded 3-day passes to Airmen who achieve a score of 90 percent or better on their end-of-course exams. With respect to rewarding fitness improvement, though, commanders need to consider the totality of the circumstances so as not to recognize Airmen whose previous lack of fitness was of their own doing. Such action by the commander could undermine efforts to culturally embed fitness.

Finally, punishment reinforces values. Airmen not meeting fitness standards need to be stripped of their supervisory responsibility. The AFI recommends this action at the third failure (that is, six months of not meeting standards),⁴⁴ but is it routinely exercised? Failure to do so is self-defeating, as commanders are in effect requiring supervisors to enforce standards that the supervisors themselves are not meeting. Additionally, commanders need to withhold promotions or delay or deny reenlistments as appropriate. The point is not so much what is done but that something is done. The tools are there for leaders to use. Using them will send strong messages reinforcing what is being communicated about the importance of physical fitness.

Recruitment, Selection, Promotion, and Excommunication

How leaders recruit, select, promote, and even excommunicate members is “one of the most subtle yet most potent ways in which leader assumptions get embedded and perpetuated.”⁴⁵ Airmen can easily relate to the first three terms, but “excommunicate” needs clarification. Merriam-Webster defines *excommunication* as exclusion from fellowship in a group or community.⁴⁶ Schein explains it as any action that relegates a member to an unimportant or powerless position. This mechanism is “subtle,” because it operates unconsciously.⁴⁷ Successful group members tend to possess the styles, assumptions, values, and beliefs the organization cherishes, while unsuccessful members or members who are marginalized likely possess values counter to the organization’s culture, hence the subtle reinforcement of which Schein speaks.

Regarding recruitment, leaders have no say over who the Air Force recruits, but they need not worry. In terms of physical fitness, new recruits have a leg up. The standards at Basic Military Training are higher and training more rigorous than in the regular active duty component, with fitness assessments involving a 2-mile timed run, a 1.5-mile timed run, sit-ups, push-ups, and pull-ups.⁴⁸ Commissioning programs use active duty standards, but officer

trainees still undergo a tougher training regimen. What leaders need to do then is to capitalize on this momentum by keeping these fit recruits motivated. Creating a mandatory duty exercise program and building a climate that expects Airmen to be fit are absolutely essential.

With respect to selection, the Air Force needs to formally adjoin fitness status into the eligibility criteria for command duty. Currently, there are no formal guidelines that would prohibit an officer who is not meeting fitness standards from being chosen for command, assuming of course the officer was able to avoid a referral report. As explained earlier, reports are only referred if the fitness status is “poor” as of the closeout date--“timing is everything.” The Air Force should also bring back the official photograph program for officers but with a full-body shot in a “class B” uniform instead of a head-only shot in service dress. This photo should be made an official part of the selection record for PME, special assignments, and promotion.

Thus, adding an official photograph to officer promotion records would reinforce the importance of fitness. For enlisted personnel, the Air Force needs to revamp the Weighted Airman Promotion System (WAPS) to incorporate fitness scores into the promotion point computation. Presently, WAPS awards points for seniority in grade and service, decorations, performance reports, and of course, promotion tests.⁴⁹ Making fitness one of the requirements for enlisted promotion would truly communicate that “our mindset is changing to one more focused on our warrior culture.”⁵⁰ At the unit level, commanders must consider fitness status when nominating or selecting junior enlisted members for below-the-zone promotion to senior airman and when pushing officers for “definitely promote” promotion recommendations.

Finally, as for the matter of excommunication, all units have a number of key positions that carry a degree of prestige. To the extent commanders have the ability to move personnel in and out of these positions, they should do so with an eye toward fitness. Specifically, they should

“select” individuals who meet or exceed fitness standards. Likewise, they should not hesitate to remove, or “excommunicate,” from these highly visible positions those persons not meeting fitness standards. Again, actions convey a great deal about leaders’ underlying assumptions.

Notes

¹ Michael Hoffman, “PT Shape-up,” *Air Force Times*, 24 November 2008, 16.

² Capt Sean C. Brazel, chief, Officer Evaluations, Headquarters United States Air Force Personnel and Manpower, electronic mail, subject: Current Fitness Program Initiatives, 21 November 2008.

³ Air Force Audit Agency, “Plans and Reports: Personnel, Training, and Services Projects,” <https://www.affa.af.mil/domainck/plansreports/audindex.shtml> (accessed 17 November 2008).

⁴ Hoffman, “PT Shape-up,” 16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶ Maj James H. Lee, Jr., Maj Dennis J. Murphy, and Maj Donald L. Perkins, “A New Air Force Physical Fitness and Weight Control Program,” Research Report no. 1405-80 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 1980), 21.

⁷ Maj Torgeir G. Fadum and Maj R. Allen McReynolds, “Effectiveness of the Air Force Fitness Program,” Research Report no. 88-0880 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 1988), 22.

⁸ Hoffman, “PT Shape-up,” 14.

⁹ LTC Matthew J. Brown, “Fitness and Its Affects on the Military,” Research Report (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College, 2005), 9.

¹⁰ Lee, Murphy, and Perkins, “New Air Force Physical Fitness,” 22.

¹¹ Lt Col Frank J. Destadio, “Peacetime Physical Fitness and Its Effect on Combat Readiness: An Air Force Perspective,” Research Report (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College, 1991), 16.

¹² Maj Richard T. Gindhart, Jr., “The Air Force Fitness Program: Is It Adequate?” Research Report (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 1999), 18.

¹³ Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-2502, *Airman Promotion Program*, 6 August 2002, 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁵ AFI 36-2606, *Reenlistment in the United States Air Force*, 21 November 2001, 29.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁷ AFI 36-2110, *Assignments*, 9 June 2003, 86.

¹⁸ Brig Gen Darrell D. Jones, director of Force Management Policy and deputy chief of staff for Manpower and Personnel, Headquarters United States Air Force (address, Air War College, Maxwell AFB, AL, 22 August 2008).

¹⁹ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 245-246.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 252-253.

²² Maj Lucille J. Warner, “USAF Physical Fitness Standards—Are They What a Fit Force Needs?” Research Report (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 2003), 26.

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- ²³ AFI 10-201, *Status of Resources and Training System*, 13 April 2006, 1.
- ²⁴ Lt Col Robert A. Barlow, "The Air Force Fitness Program: An Application of the Gingrich 'Vision vs. Tactics' Test," Research Report (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air War College, 1990), 53.
- ²⁵ Capt Donald E. Smith, deputy chief, Air Force Readiness and Compliance Inspections Office, Office of the Inspector General, Headquarters United States Air Force, electronic mail, subject: Inspector General Reports Relating to Fitness Inspections, 14 November 2008.
- ²⁶ Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 254.
- ²⁷ Maj David M. Houghland, chief of Air Reserve Component (ARC) Training, Air Force Judge Advocate General School, electronic mail, subject: Web-based Administrative Separations Program (WASP), 4 December 2008.
- ²⁸ Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 257.
- ²⁹ Gen John P. Jumper, chief of staff of the United States Air Force, Chief's Sight Picture, subject: Fit to Fight #4 – Supporting Fitness, 12 December 2003.
- ³⁰ AFI 10-248, *Fitness Program*, 25 September 2006, 43.
- ³¹ Ibid., 10.
- ³² Hoffman, "PT Shape-up," 14.
- ³³ Julie Marie Ballaro, "The Effectiveness of the Air Force Fitness Program During Deployments" (PhD diss., Argosy University-Sarasota, 2002), 130.
- ³⁴ Gindhart, "Air Force Fitness Program," 25.
- ³⁵ Maj Denise M. Hollywood, "Airman First – Can Fitness Play a Part?" Research Report (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 2001), 26.
- ³⁶ Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 258.
- ³⁷ Gregory Lowrimore, deputy director, Air Force Colonel Management Office, Headquarters United States Air Force (address, Air War College, Maxwell AFB, AL, 13 November 2008).
- ³⁸ AFI 41-210, *Patient Administration Functions*, 22 March 2006, 146.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 145-146.
- ⁴⁰ Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 259-260.
- ⁴¹ Maj David C. Hayen, "Air Force Fitness – Back to Basic," Research Report (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 2003), 14-15.
- ⁴² Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1308.3, *DoD Physical Fitness and Body Fat Programs Procedures*, 5 November 2002, 5.
- ⁴³ AFI 36-3003, *Military Leave Program*, 20 October 2005, 41.
- ⁴⁴ AFI 10-248, *Fitness Program*, 74.
- ⁴⁵ Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 261.
- ⁴⁶ Merriam-Webster OnLine Dictionary, s.v. "Excommunication," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> (accessed 25 January 2009).
- ⁴⁷ Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 261.
- ⁴⁸ Baseops Network Web site, US Air Force Basic Training, http://www.baseops.net/basic_training/airforce_fitness.html (accessed 18 December 2008).
- ⁴⁹ AFI 36-2502, *Airman Promotion Program*, 25-26.
- ⁵⁰ Gen John P. Jumper, chief of staff of the United States Air Force, Chief's Sight Picture, subject: Fit to Fight #5 – Message to Commanders, 8 January 2004.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Yet despite a four-year-old “fit to fight” program designed to get airmen into better physical shape, the Air Force has made almost no progress in improving fitness servicewide. Indeed, the obesity rate among airmen today is more than double what it was in 1995.

—Michael Hoffman, 30 April 2008

Few deny the value of physical fitness. Even fewer deny the need for a fit force, even a fit Air Force. In retrospect, General Jumper’s “Fit to Fight” initiative should be widely applauded. But, declaring that “we are changing the culture”¹ seems almost laughable in light of steadily rising obesity rates. As it stands, the AFFP is more “admin” than “ethos,” and as stated earlier, it is not enough to simply proclaim a cultural change is underway. When an organization’s culture is stable owing to a long history of success--and this is certainly the Air Force’s situation today--leaders discover that manipulations are often limited or superficial in their effects.

“To change deeply embedded assumptions,” Schein explains, “requires far more effort and time.”² This point must not be lost. Absent a serious threat to survival, change to culture only occurs in small increments. The service must be patient; change takes time. Leaders at all levels must also ensure consistency in fitness word and deed. Through constant reinforcement, Airmen will continue to see the value of fitness and begin to accept it as an unchallengeable assumption. A culture of fitness will then emerge, enabling the Air Force to focus entirely on the adversary without worrying if its Airmen are truly “fit to fight.” The American people deserve no less.

Notes

¹ Gen John P. Jumper, chief of staff of the United States Air Force, Chief's Sight Picture, subject: Fit to Fight #3 – Assessing Our Fitness, 17 October 2003.

² Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 292.

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